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UNCLAS HARARE 001093

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HARARE MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS: PLATFORMS FOR POLITICS

1. (U) Laboff attended the Harare May Day rally of the Zimbabwe Conference of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the umbrella labor organization which is under attack by the GOZ. While the May Day celebration has traditionally been the forum for the ZCTU to address its worker constituency, this year also saw a direct challenge in the form of a competing rally by the government-sponsored competing organization -- the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU). The ZFTU has been deliberately muscling in on the activities of the ZCTU, going so far as to force union members to sign forms which re-direct their membership and payment of dues from the ZCTU to the ZFTU. This year, the ZFTU deliberately pre-empted -- apparently with GOZ support -- the ZCTU's May Day activities by pre-booking the majority of venues where the ZCTU's celebrations have traditionally been held. In Harare, for instance, the ZCTU's event took place at the smaller Gwanzura stadium because of a ZFTU rally, accompanied by a soccer match, at Rufaro Stadium.

2. (U) The ZCTU's event included a parade of about 15 member unions and speeches by leaders of student unions, teachers' unions, and the National Constitutional Assembly as well as ZCTU leadership. The rhetoric consistently emphasized cooperation between the various civil organizations and resistance to the "illegitimate" election of Mugabe. Although socialist Member of Parliament Munyaradzi Gwisai (in whose district this event was held), resplendent in a black beret and Che Guevara t-shirt, called for mass action against Zanu-PF, the speeches were more of a call to resistance, rather than a call to arms.

3. (U) Contrary to newspaper reports which optimistically claimed ZCTU attendance of 20,000, we estimate the actual figure was more in the range of 5000-7500. There was a significant police presence, including riot control forces, but the event was peaceful. At the rival ZFTU rally at Rufaro Stadium, attendance was very limited until the start of a highly anticipated soccer match, a crowd-draw tactic also used by the President at his recent inauguration.

SULLIVAN